What is claimed is:

1. A method for decreasing the amount of mSREBP in a cell characterized by an elevated level of mSREBP comprising contacting the cell with an agent that specifically inhibits *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the cell, thereby decreasing the amount of mSREBP in the cell.

2. A method for decreasing cholesterol synthesis in a cell characterized by an elevated level of mSREBP comprising contacting the cell with an agent that specifically inhibits *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the cell, thereby decreasing cholesterol synthesis in the cell.

3. A method for decreasing fatty acid synthesis in a cell characterized by an elevated level of mSREBP comprising contacting the cell with an agent that specifically inhibits *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the cell, thereby decreasing fatty acid synthesis in the cell.

4. A method for decreasing triglyceride synthesis in a cell characterized by an elevated level of mSREBP comprising contacting the cell with an agent that specifically inhibits *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the cell, thereby decreasing triglyceride synthesis in the cell.

5. The method of claim 1, 2, 3 or 4, wherein the cell is a human cell.

6. The method of claim 1, 2, 3 or 4, wherein the cell is a hepatocyte.

7. The method of claim 1, 2, 3 or 4, wherein the cell is an adipocyte.

8. The method of claim 1, 2, 3 or 4, wherein the agent specifically inhibits the activity of an enzyme which catalyzes part of the *de novo* ceramide pathway.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the enzyme is serine-palmitoyl transferase or ceramide synthase.

10. The method of claim 1, 2, 3 or 4, wherein the agent inhibits the expression of an enzyme which catalyzes part of the *de novo* ceramide pathway.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein the enzyme is serine-palmitoyl transferase or ceramide synthase.

12. The method of claim 1, 2, 3 or 4, wherein the agent is selected from the group consisting of (a) myriocin; (b) cycloserine; (c) Fumonisin B1; (d) PPMP; (e) compound D609; (f) methylthiodihydroceramide; (g) propanolol; and (h) resvaratrol.

13. A method for increasing the amount of mSREBP in a cell comprising contacting the cell with an agent that specifically increases *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the cell, thereby increasing the amount of mSREBP in the cell.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein the cell is a human cell.

15. The method of claim 13, wherein the cell is a hepatocyte.

16. The method of claim 13, wherein the cell is an adipocyte.

17. A method for treating a subject afflicted with a disorder characterized by an elevated level of mSREBP in the

subject's cells comprising administering to the subject a therapeutically effective amount of an agent that specifically inhibits *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the subject's cells, thereby treating the subject.

18. A method for treating a subject afflicted with a disorder characterized by increased ceramide synthesis in the subject's cells comprising administering to the subject a therapeutically effective amount of an agent that specifically inhibits *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the subject's cells, thereby treating the subject.

19. A method for treating a subject afflicted with an elevated cholesterol level comprising administering to the subject a therapeutically effective amount of an agent that specifically inhibits *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the subject's cells, thereby treating the subject.

20. A method for treating a subject afflicted with an elevated fatty acid level comprising administering to the subject a therapeutically effective amount of an agent that specifically inhibits *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the subject's cells, thereby treating the subject.

21. A method for treating a subject afflicted with an elevated triglyceride level comprising administering to the subject a therapeutically effective amount of an agent that specifically inhibits *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the subject's cells, thereby treating the subject.

22. The method of claim 17, 18, 19, 20 or 21, wherein the subject is a human.

23. The method of claim 17 or 18, wherein the disorder is a lipid disorder.

24. The method of claim 23, wherein the lipid disorder is selected from the group consisting of (a) hypercholesterolemia; (b) hypertriglyceridemia; (c) combined familial hyperlipidemia; (d) obesity; (e) type I diabetes; (f) type II diabetes; (g) alcoholism; (h) metabolic syndrome; (i) syndrome X; (j) hypertension; and (k) cardiovascular disease.

25. The method of claims 17 or 18, wherein the disorder is selected from the group consisting of (a) hereditary sensory neuropathy; (b) Niemann Pick Disease Type A; and (c) Niemann Pick Disease Type B.

26. The method of claim 17, 18, 19, 20 or 21, wherein the agent is selected from the group consisting of (a) myriocin; (b) cycloserine; (c) Fumonisin B1; (d) PPMP; (e) compound D609; (f) methylthiodihydroceramide; (g) propanolol; and (h) resvaratrol.

27. A method for inhibiting in a subject the onset of a disorder characterized by an elevated level of mSREBP in the subject's cells comprising administering to the subject a prophylactically effective amount of an agent that specifically inhibits *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the subject's cells, thereby inhibiting the onset of the disorder.

28. A method for inhibiting in a subject the onset of a disorder characterized by increased ceramide synthesis in the subject's cells comprising administering to the subject a prophylactically effective amount of an agent that

specifically inhibits *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the subject's cells, thereby inhibiting the onset of the disorder.

29. A method for inhibiting in a subject the onset of a disorder characterized by an elevated cholesterol level in the subject comprising administering to the subject a prophylactically effective amount of an agent that specifically inhibits *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the subject's cells, thereby inhibiting the onset of the disorder.

30. A method for inhibiting in a subject the onset of a disorder characterized by an elevated fatty acid level in the subject comprising administering to the subject a prophylactically effective amount of an agent that specifically inhibits *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the subject's cells, thereby inhibiting the onset of the disorder.

31. A method for inhibiting in a subject the onset of a disorder characterized by an elevated triglyceride level in the subject comprising administering to the subject a prophylactically effective amount of an agent that specifically inhibits *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the subject's cells, thereby inhibiting the onset of the disorder.

32. The method of claim 27, 28, 29, 30 or 31, wherein the subject is a human.

33. The method of claim 27 or 28, wherein the disorder is a primary lipid disorder.

34. The method of claim 33, wherein the primary lipid disorder is selected from the group consisting of (a) hypercholesterolemia; (b) hypertriglyceridemia; (c) combined familial hyperlipidemia; (d) obesity; (e) type I diabetes; (f) type II diabetes; (g) alcoholism; (h) metabolic syndrome; (i) syndrome X; (j) hypertension; and (k) cardiovascular disease.

35. The method of claims 27 or 28, wherein the disorder is selected from the group consisting of (a) hereditary sensory neuropathy; (b) Niemann Pick Disease Type A; and (c) Niemann Pick Disease Type B.

36. The method of claim 27, 28, 29, 30 or 31, wherein the agent is selected from the group consisting of (a) myriocin; (b) cycloserine; (c) Fumonisin B1; (d) PPMP; (e) compound D609; (f) methylthiodihydroceramide; (g) propanolol; and (h) resvaratrol.

37. A method for increasing the amount of mSREBP in the cells of a non-human subject comprising administering to the subject an effective amount of an agent that specifically increases *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the subject's cells, thereby increasing the amount of mSREBP in the subject's cells.

38. An article of manufacture comprising a packaging material having therein an agent that specifically inhibits *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in a cell, and a label indicating a use for the agent in treating or inhibiting the onset of a disorder in a subject, which disorder is characterized by an elevated level of mSREBP in the subject's cells.

39. An article of manufacture comprising a packaging material having therein an agent that specifically inhibits *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in a cell, and a label indicating a use for treating or inhibiting the onset of an elevated cholesterol level in a subject.

40. An article of manufacture comprising a packaging material having therein an agent that specifically inhibits *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in a cell, and a label indicating a use for treating or inhibiting the onset of an elevated fatty acid level in a subject.

41. An article of manufacture comprising a packaging material having therein an agent that specifically inhibits *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in a cell, and a label indicating a use for treating or inhibiting the onset of an elevated triglyceride level in a subject.

42. A method for determining whether an agent decreases *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in a cell, which method comprises the steps of:

(a) contacting the cell with the agent under suitable conditions;

(b) determining the amount of *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the cell after a suitable period of time; and

(c) comparing the amount of *de novo* synthesis of ceramide determined in step (b) with the amount of *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in a cell in the absence of the agent, a lower amount of *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the cell contacted with the agent indicating that the agent decreases the amount of *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the cell.

43. A method for determining whether an agent increases *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in a cell, which method comprises the steps of:

(a) contacting the cell with the agent under suitable conditions;

(b) determining the amount of *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the cell after a suitable period of time; and

(c) comparing the amount of *de novo* synthesis of ceramide determined in step (b) with the amount of *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in a cell in the absence of the agent, a greater amount of *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the cell contacted with the agent indicating that the agent increases the amount of *de novo* synthesis of ceramide in the cell.